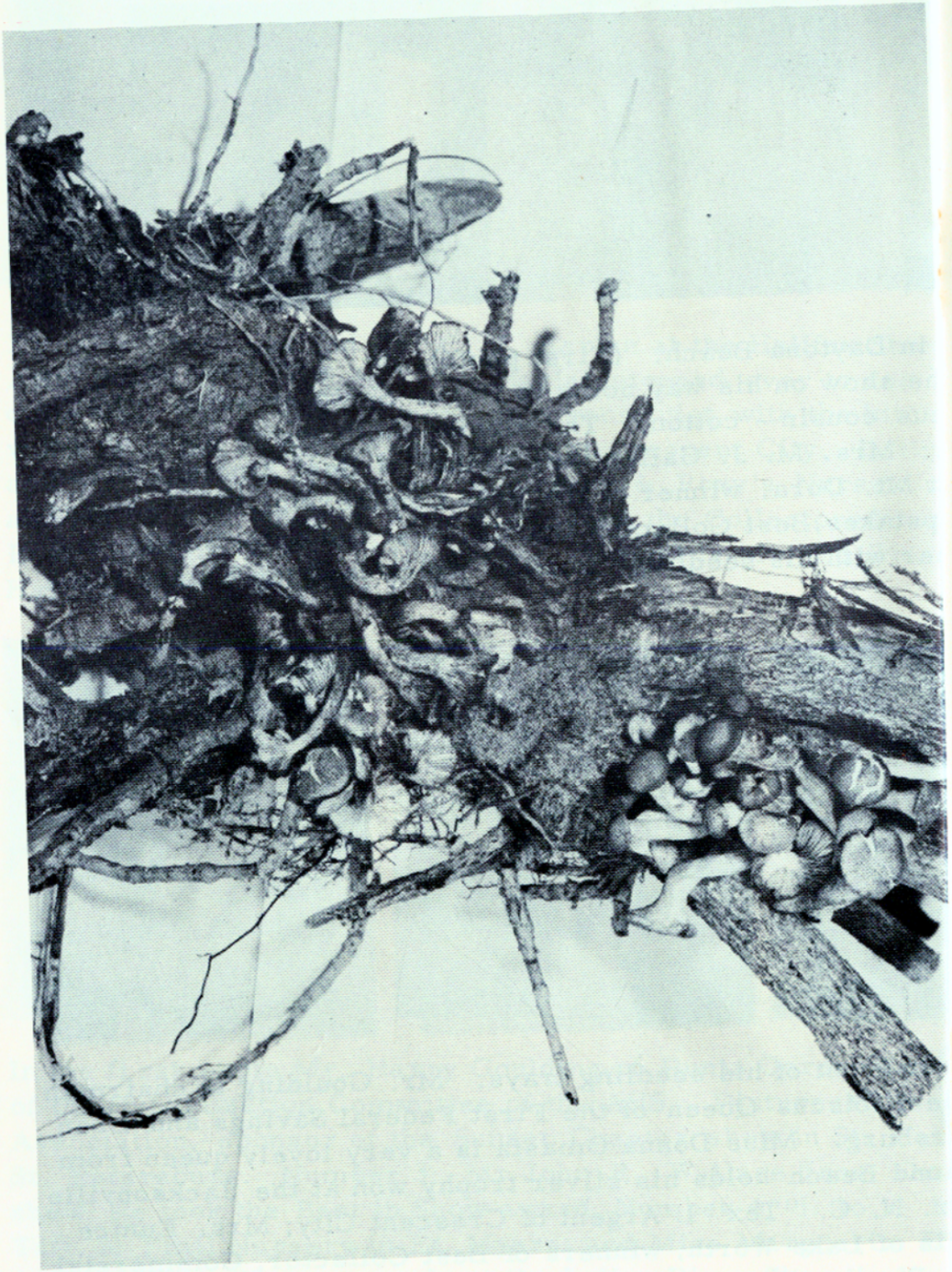

MUSHROOM ROOT ROT

(See photo on facing page) - Paul F. White

Mushroom root rot is caused by a fungus that is normally parasitic on roots of oak and hickory. Although not a serious pest it is a persistent one because when root pieces are left in the soil after clearing, the fungus may attack most cultivated woody plants. Like all fungi, the body is little threads of cells that enter and feed on the roots long before we see the fruiting body or mushroom. The disease will attack silently for several years until in the late fall or winter when mushrooms begin to poke up through the mulch. When mature this genus has white spores (excellent for making spore prints which is an acceptable substitute for tending your now dying hibiscus.)

Before the fruiting bodies appear the bark on the roots will rot and slip off. General decline of the plant will be evident and some apparent deficiency symptoms will result.

Control is difficult but not impossible. All dead roots should be removed from cleared land at least a month before the placing of new plants. One can dust with Cold Smoke or drench with Tersan. In any good pest control program one should use one of the newer systematic pesticides and, if continued, ought to control this pest. If your bushes already are infected you may cut back dead roots and treat as above. In addition, leaving the exposed crown to the air for several weeks might help. Do not remove from the soil completely.

Fortunately this disease is not common but just wide spread. Among the plants reported as attacked by this disease are acalypha, Amazon-lily, azalea, cherry-laurel, citrus, crepe-myrtle, camellia, hibiscus, holly, ixora, jacaranda, Jerusalem-thorn, jasmine, loquat, oleander, pittosporum, poinsettia, privet, rose, turks-cap, viburnum, wax-myrtle, and Washington palm.

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